



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

SIX SMUGGLERS FOUND GUILTY OF HOSTAGE TAKING

HOUSTON—A federal jury here Wednesday returned a guilty verdict finding six defendants guilty of alien smuggling, hostage taking, transporting and harboring illegal aliens into the United States, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Houston Special Agent-in-Charge Joseph R. Webber, and announced by U.S. Attorney Michael Shelby, Southern District of Texas.

The 30-count indictment alleged that on March 12, Edy Guardado-Mezen, 26; Jose Marlon Ibarra-Zelaya, 26, Jose Efrain Linares-Tabora, 27; Henry Gutierrez-Andrade, 26; Elbin Geovanny-Mezen, 23; and Marvin Arturo Peralta-Ramirez, 23, all Honduran nationals illegally in the United States, took 15 undocumented aliens hostage at gunpoint from another group of smugglers inside an apartment in the 1300 block of Greens Parkway.

Houston Police Department (HPD) officers responded to a 911 call indicating that a group of undocumented aliens were being held at gunpoint, and were being transported inside a vehicle to another location. HPD arrived at the apartment complex, stopped the vehicle matching the description, and discovered that none of the occupants had proper identification.

HPD contacted ICE for assistance. ICE agents discovered 20 other undocumented aliens with the smugglers inside the apartment along with a number of weapons.

Many of the undocumented aliens apprehended indicated to ICE agents that they had arrived at the apartment with another group of smugglers, but that the six defendants had burst into that location with weapons drawn and forced them into their vehicle.

“These hostage situations have escalated in violence over time,” said Joseph R. Webber, ICE Houston special agent-in-charge. “We are now seeing more smuggling cases involving highly organized criminal enterprises that callously hold their victims captive. We will vigorously pursue and investigate these cases with every available law enforcement tool to bring those responsible to justice.”

All six defendants were identified as having taken the group of aliens at gunpoint and demanding that the aliens supply the phone numbers of friends or family members so that smuggling fees of approximately \$1,500 per alien could be paid to secure their release.

U.S. District Judge Nancy F. Atlas, who presided over the trial, set sentencing for Feb. 4. Defendants Edy Guardado Mezen and Elbin Geovany Mezen each face a mandatory minimum sentence of 30 years to life imprisonment without parole. All other defendants face up to life in prison without parole.

Griselda Barnica-Magariegos was convicted of conspiracy to harbor and transport illegal aliens following a guilty plea entered before the trial commenced; her sentencing before Judge Atlas is scheduled in December. She faces up to 10 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.